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**Physical Actor Training 2.0. New digital horizons**

**Abstract**

This article explores how actor training, and physical actor training especially, can shift from the well-established historical norm of live workshop interaction to embrace online possibilities. It briefly examines some of the contextual issues around institutional approaches to training, including recent changes in British Higher Education and students’ expectations, and charts some digital innovations in the field. It notes how significant these advances have been in dance, wondering how these might impact on actor training. It then traces the author’s own evolutionary history of publishing using analogue and then digital tools, from drawings, through CDROMs and DVDs to online materials. This has culminated in the recent publication of ‘Physical Actor training – an online A-Z’, for Methuen Drama Bloomsbury. The A-Z is introduced as a case study, showing how the project team developed film material as a means to articulate key aspects of training practice; for example by showing the learning and training process, for presenting voice work and for actors’ explorations of space and movement. The article describes how many of the project’s films were augmented with various digital tools, such as on-screen animation and it introduces some of the range of approaches in filming and editing that were adopted to differentiate each A-Z term, with references to exemplar films. It concludes by suggesting that we are only at the beginning of a digital revolution regards actor training, its documentation and analysis and related publishing practices, of which this project is a key part.

**Key Words:** digital; training; online; publishing; physical acting; film.

**Physical Actor Training 2.0. New digital horizons**

Globally, conservatoires have long and distinguished track records for training performers across the spectrum of performing arts. They are, though, increasingly competing with universities and private providers (i.e. non-government or non-publicly-funded bodies), as they are called in Britain, some of whose trai ning courses do not lead to formal qualifications. Regardless of whether institutions set out to train or not, their graduating students might believe that they have been trained. And if they obtain sustained work in their chosen creative profession after such studies, who are we to counter this? Training is an extremely malleable word that shifts and changes according to its many contexts and those implicated, be they teachers, trainees, students, workshop leaders or other.

Semantics aside, what training comprises in practice is less mutable. Since formalised or institutionalized actor training first began, it has been predicated almost exclusively on the core principle of live person-to-person coaching and guidance.[[1]](#endnote-1) The iterative process of accumulating expertise and experience under the watchful eyes of teachers, often theatre directors or current or former performers themselves, frequently cross-generationally, is still widely considered the only model by those who train or teach today. I would not refute the need for such live human interaction, but are we missing a ‘digital trick’ if we do not find new ways to support and even enhance such processes? How might the increasing digitization, automation and Artificial Intelligence that are radically changing the ways we all interact, work, move and socialise impact on acting? At the close of the last century it seemed too speculative that driverless cars would imminently be ferrying us around. Who might have thought then that performances would regularly be live streamed simultaneously to large global audiences? Past fantasy rapidly becomes today’s reality.

There are still few precedents of such digital training approaches, as Caroline Wake reveals in her survey article (2018). To explore some implications of how actor training (and what I distinguish here as its physical variant) might be transformed by digital tools, methods and resources, I will therefore use my own project as case study.[[2]](#endnote-2) ‘Physical Actor Training – an online A-Z’ (PATAZ or the A-Z for short) was led by myself with co-trainer Frank Camilleri from the University of Malta and a camera crew of Peter Hulton (of Arts Archives) and Stacie Lee Bennett (who also worked as Research Associate and editor of all the films).[[3]](#endnote-3) The project asked several questions: given the need for live presence in training, as mentioned earlier, is the notion that students can also be trained online or remotely a step too far?; if we do accept this premise, how might digital tools extend possibilities for those who are perhaps less fortunate, able or indeed talented enough to enter formal training?; what about those who do not want or are unable to explore physical processes across the three or four-year commitment to a full course? Whatever we might think about alternative models, we should at least be aware of the political and social implications of what we currently do and how then we might, or perhaps even should, do things differently.

Many training institutions with long legacies have proved their sustainability and importance; but just as approaches to education are rapidly evolving, so is the broader educational and social context in which training now happens changing quickly and extensively. Stefan Collini is an articulate analyst of the cultural shift that has turned students into customers in the UK, as teaching has increasingly become perceived as a commercial transaction.[[4]](#endnote-4) One significant consequence is that these same students often have to work part time to pay for their studies and are, for a multitude of reasons, less likely to read books, affecting the humanities and social sciences in particular.[[5]](#endnote-5) Learning is increasingly bite-sized, modularised, perhaps even piecemeal.

Such changes in Higher Education inevitably reflect wider social patterns. Much research has been published on how mobile phone use is affecting concentration and attention spans, how we are becoming dependent on smart phones and technology, and how this is affecting the quality of personal interactions.[[6]](#endnote-6) So much for the pessimists. Yet the digital age surely also offers numerous opportunities, beyond the pleasure and value of instant access to information in a range of formats. With a visceral metaphor, German scholar, dramaturg and Rimini Protokoll collaborator Imanuel Schipper has suggested in relation to performance that

Contemporary theatre practitioners inhale possibilities of digital cultures and adapt how technologies and their use are changing the viewing habits for their productions. The strongest impact of digital cultures on the field of theatre is documented by the fact that the audience has become more and more a real coproducer of the performance.[[7]](#endnote-7)

Schipper’s point applies to much work beyond the specific practice of his own highly influential company. Similar changes in behavioural patterns are visible in more popular cultural domains too: the widespread global growth of digital streaming of live performance, mentioned earlier, is just one example of the changes affecting how people attend events today.

‘Coproducing’ for Schipper has a political dimension too: breaking down hierarchies, hitting back against culture’s increased marketisation and commodification and taking steps towards common ownership of the means of production. If we assume that trainers and teachers are responsible for training students for the theatre that exists ‘out there’, surely the modes and to some extent the politics of training also need to alter? The unrelenting growth of devised theatre and theatre-making, as well as the widespread prevalence of new digital media and tools combine with a much more open educational ‘market’ to challenge not only the assumed dominance of well-established specialist institutions that train performers, but also long-held notions of how students might be trained.[[8]](#endnote-8) Have trainers and institutions really caught up with this shift and made appropriate adjustments?

It is clear that both the teaching of acting and theatre practice and, at its more extreme edge, actor training, have work to do. They are very much out of step with dance, for example. Choreographers like Siobhan Davies and William Forsythe and researchers like Scott deLahunta have been exploring digital options for dance and choreography for over two decades now.[[9]](#endnote-9) Much of this research and practice has been focused on better managing access to and searchability across large dance archives. But it has also created digital tools to help develop, understand and visualise choreographic processes. Perhaps the metaphor of being ‘out of step’ points to one reason for theatre’s time lag. Choreographic practices can be more easily computerised and annotated. Though the following materialities have by no means been dance research’s only concerns, there is a kind of scientific objectivity at play in a taxonomy for dance that focuses on such forces as movement, trajectory, weight, distance, spatial dynamics, tempo and patterns. Can a process like actor training or acting be so reduced?

In an article written with Florian Jennett, deLahunta discusses capturing and annotating ‘human activity’ and generating ‘spatial data’:

In the case of *Synchronous Objects*, this data when digitally re-materialised, for example as abstract animations on the website, could be said to represent different aspects of the choreography while appearing in forms that no longer look like the dance entity *One Flat Thing, reproduced*.[[10]](#endnote-10)

We instantly perceive how far such research in dance has come. But theatre is different from dance, just as training is not choreography. How might we ‘annotate’ the voice in the way that Piecemaker, software that enables both the annotation and scoring of choreography, does for dance and movement?[[11]](#endnote-11) (Fig 1) Even if we wanted to, how would we chart or digitally depict emotional responses, an impulse? How could we ‘map out’ a trainer’s hands-on manipulation, a verbal exhortation? Such a task, following this article’s title, is probably more for physical actor training 3.0. Yet there is still much that actor training can do even now to engage with such digital advances and research.

**Digital Teaching: thoughts on evolution**

Drama has always been at the forefront of deploying interactive models of learning. Notions of interactivity are today firmly understood and widely adopted in pedagogy and encompass so much more than simple role playing or acting out.[[12]](#endnote-12) The model of the teacher as transmitter, which, I would argue, is the basis of most models of actor training, is increasingly being challenged by the ‘teacher as facilitator’ model. Teachers in the latter mould provide access to carefully curated resources and give guidance on how to navigate, interpret and use them with sound critical judgement – part of what is now called ‘flipped learning’.[[13]](#endnote-13) With multimedia learning, teaching extends well beyond classroom activity to rely on online materials and platforms, perhaps evolving further into ‘blended learning’ which is part face to face/part remote, extending into ‘distance learning’ which is almost exclusively remote.

Increasingly frequently in my teaching over the last 25 years I have become aware of a disjuncture between how I myself was taught in a very small cohort and how my and other students today are themselves learning and training. I completed a drama degree in the mid-1980s in the UK which was intensely practical with long hours, a kind of training of sorts, though it was never meant to be such.[[14]](#endnote-14) The core academic resources, beyond the teachers themselves, were studio spaces and books, the latter a ragbag assembly of a kind of familiar canon of directors’ reflections: the usual suspects of Jerzy Grotowski, Konstantin Stanislavski and Bertolt Brecht. We were of course encouraged to read these, though with minimal guidance or follow up from most teachers. Thirty years later, students can draw on a vast range of academic sources supported by extensive digital material, from youtube clips of theatre performances and workshops to posts by gymnasts, pranksters and a whole host of others related to physical practices. It’s all performance and it’s all out there; and, as a bonus, much of it is free. Moreover, such access is wrapped around with guidance and support for students that go well beyond anything available to me in the 1980s.

Given this digital plethora, the still dominant notion of a ‘reading list’ seems alarmingly anachronistic and limiting. Most non-library-based material is, though, uncurated, not always permanently available or legal, and also very variable in quality, however useful, engaging or inspiring it might otherwise be. Though not open source, websites and online offerings like those of Alexander Street, Arts Archives, Digital Theatre+, Drama Online, and the Routledge Performance Archive (RPA) have been pioneering in attempting to counteract this dispersal.[[15]](#endnote-15) With the exception of Arts Archives, all are predicated on a commercial model and most, at the time of writing, depend on institutional rather than individual subscription. Somewhat ironically, their viewership is therefore unlikely to include the professional groups and artists who provide much of their material. But they are at least trying to order what often appears to be the chaos of the internet.

Unsurprisingly then, the nature of the canon is more and more contested, if even the very idea of a canon has any standing at all today. This returns us again to the democratizing potential of the internet. Taking extracts and clips into the studio on phones and tablets to practise, imitate and even embody, students can self-educate, perhaps even self-train, the auto-didacticism that Camilleri’s 2015 article describes so positively. This is a problematic notion, but one that we increasingly need to face into. What might training become in such disembodied and virtual terms, where live practice is supported and enhanced by digital media of all kinds and qualities and, perhaps further down the line, even begins to replace it? Total online delivery of actor training might be inconceivable, but with the relentless marketisation of education, the need to offer flexible learning, and increasing costs for students and institutions alike, it could be foisted on us by eager cost-cutting managers; especially if our current methods seem so out of kilter with social and educational trends, the profession and how performances are actually made. Is it not better and more responsible to work out how to address such demands ourselves first?

**Digital Publishing: thoughts on a revolution**

This evolution in pedagogic methods which I have just characterized has gone hand in hand with radical changes in academic publishing, of which ebooks are just the tip of a large iceberg. Pedagogy has evolved but publishing seems to have undergone a more seismic revolution. To help illustrate one aspect of this, I will use my own publication history as an example. From the beginning I incorporated images in my works, and was an early adopter of emerging digital platforms. Stage designer Rae Smith drew some pencil sketches of a 3-hour workshop I led based on Gardzienice Theatre Association’s training approach which I included in my book on the company.[[16]](#endnote-16) I then collaborated with Peter Hulton of Arts Archives on a CDROM about Tadashi Suzuki’s training, the Suzuki method, in which the viewer could opt to hear me elaborating details at relevant moments on the CDROM’s timeline. (Allain 2001) In 2011, Hulton and I collaborated again on a DVD with booklet of and about Russian teacher Andrei Droznin’s movement practice. Even as this was published, it seemed absurd that this wasn’t distributed or streamed on the web instead, as indeed the films now are on the RPA.[[17]](#endnote-17) My 2015 book of Jerzy Grotowski’s actor Zbigniew Cynkutis’s approach to acting and directing included over 70 photographs, posters and illustrations, many of them sketches by Bill Ireland of Cynkutis’s workshops from the 1970s, of which no film exists. (Cynkutis 2015)

With the Cynkutis book, things had come full circle, a reminder that digital formats need not replace more traditional modes of publishing. Even if digitisation has led to a publishing revolution in certain aspects of the making process and distribution especially, the direction of travel is not one way: a simple well-executed line drawing in a paper book, as in the Cynkutis or Litz Pisk’s 1974 *Actor and his Body*, can capture volumes, suggesting movement, atmosphere, space and an epoch. Bill Ireland’s drawings of Cynkutis’s training moved artfully beyond literal representation to suggest weight, trajectory, emphasis and what Cynkutis called ‘vectors’, broadly meaning the direction of travel for the body or its specific parts. Fig 2 We also cannot create films where none existed as with Cynkutis, although we can be creative with the past: photographic colourisation projects reveal how technology can be used in ways that fundamentally alter past documents, giving them an entirely new life and quite another sensibility. (Carroll 2017)

It is important not to perpetuate a position that digital=new=good and analogue=old=bad. Yet several elements were elusive or non-existent in all these aforementioned sketches, illustrations or photographs. Again, my own experience and research in physical actor training underlines this point. For me especially, these missing elements were a lamentable and notable absence, highlighting most starkly how voice and sound could not be captured. Experimental voice work is, and always has been, a dominant feature of the practices I research. Whilst good at fixing isolated instances of motion, these media also struggled to capture sustained or durational movement, flow, different qualities of energy and weight, tempo, or complex spatial dimensions. An example relates to the Suzuki method. I had previously read Tadashi Suzuki’s own explanation of the ‘stamp’ in ‘The Grammar of the Feet’ in his *The Way of Acting*. I only realized how little of the stamp’s actual force and technique I had grasped when I actually undertook Suzuki training in 1995, well before such video materials were widely available. Static images and textual description struggle to fully articulate many aspects of physical actor training.

These forms also failed, ironically, to encapsulate failure as part of the process of learning. As a university lecturer, especially considering my British context where today’s students pay such high tuition fees and take out huge loans, I am painfully aware of both success and failure in learning. Much of my research has been into and around long-established theatre groups or laboratories that were initially auto-didactic: Barba formed Odin Teatret from drama school ‘rejects’, as probably the most apposite example. Many of my students at the University of Kent might also have ‘failed’, as they perhaps perceive it, to get into drama school. Beyond failure on such a macro-scale, I was curious how we could show students doing, failing, repeating and succeeding, the core components in any learning or training process.[[18]](#endnote-18)

**PATAZ: an overview**

Digital changes in publishing could provide such an opportunity, as I will now explore in relation to my own online film project. The A-Z came out of this publishing revolution, which my own research had shaped and fed into, as well as this digital evolution in pedagogical practice. It was also an attempt to somehow document and pass on something of my nearly three decades of experience and professional practice as teacher, actor trainer and movement director, the latter most notably with director Katie Mitchell at the beginning of her career.

A book seemed both inappropriate and insufficient to capture this. How, as just one example, could I write sounds? Digital film on an online platform seemed a more appropriate delivery mode to present process and show learning/training. We could add commentary and observations and supplement the films with additional guidance and reflection: highlights or directional arrows, onscreen textual instructions or summaries reiterating key points, and graphics such as spatially defining spheres; all of which elements we did use. The project also aimed to document but also actively instruct and guide, to both show and do. A digital format made such a hybrid possible, going beyond the rather limiting boxed instructions for classroom tasks found in many paper textbooks.

From the beginning, we project leaders felt it important to provide insights into the trainees’ experience.[[19]](#endnote-19) In writing the funding bid, I had recalled how Stanislavski’s seminal actor training texts had deployed the device of student Kostya’s initial failures and doubts and his subsequent development in the hands of teacher Tortsov, thereby demonstrating the developmental workings and subtleties of the training process.[[20]](#endnote-20) A hundred years later, we also were interested in hearing the trainees’ views and charting their progress.

We also deemed it important to foreground the difference between Camilleri and my approaches as co-trainers. We had worked together closely as teachers and lecturers in university contexts, had shared roots in Grotowskian and physical traditions, but had very different pedagogic practices. Conservatoire and other training models are often predicated on the presence of charismatic figures. This can go so far as key teachers and their approaches becoming synonymous with specific institutions, even sometimes enshrined in the institutions’ names. By presenting the trainees’ reflections alongside the practice of two trainers we hoped to move away from a top-down hierarchical teaching model to show diverse approaches to working with similar material or topics and the benefits of dialogue and difference. Some online material, particularly when it showcases competitive virtuosity, can be off-putting for foundational students (‘foundational’ is how we described our primary target audience, meaning students near the start of their training). Such explicit virtuosity might also reinforce the value of over-directed, coercive and hierarchical training processes – principles which my work has never espoused.

I was, in addition, wary of furthering the simplistic message contained in the very premise of ‘how to act’ guides. How can a complex process such as acting be read about, absorbed and then successfully enacted, as if it is a linear almost systematic process? I have never encouraged imitation but rather have always tried to create a supportive environment with clear aspirations and principles and opportunities for students to develop their own practice. Training for me, as for most teachers and trainers I would hope, is about responding to and enhancing individual processes and needs rather than promoting methods or formulae about what and what not to do. This of course takes the imparting of technical knowledge as a given, which has its own very precise demands.

We could have published the materials on our own bespoke open access website. This would have had advantages in terms of being able to design a suitable platform from scratch and it being free to view but it might have weakened the funding application. It also might have been relatively invisible, with the need to build a prospective audience from nothing. Finding a UK publisher for PATAZ was relatively straightforward: few were working with digital materials to any extent beyond ebooks and therefore able to host such an A-Z. I feared that the films might get lost in the wide range of audiovisual materials in the RPA, which housed some of my previous research.[[21]](#endnote-21) Alexander Street had a quickly expanding platform but were not commissioning new materials. At the time of writing the funding bid, Digital Theatre+ was only just shifting towards generating more Higher Education-focused material. Methuen Drama Bloomsbury’s Drama Online platform, initially and predominantly a play resource, was well established and used by students across schools, universities and conservatoires worldwide. Drawn to the publisher’s combined academic and practitioner focus, I considered that our A-Z would be a good corollary to this play collection.

The downside of this decision was three-fold: the films would sit behind a paywall; there was no interactive potential, as no one could respond to us or comment on our material directly through embedded social media channels; and the need to fit into their web format. Our natural home on Drama Online would have been under the tab ‘Theatre Craft’ but this area of their website is not enabled for films. The A-Z now sits awkwardly under ‘Plays’ until the website’s reboot, promised for 2019. We therefore set up our own companion website, *The Digital Performer*, in part to solicit feedback and encourage engagement but also to present a small selection of our films for free as well as wider aspects of our research.[[22]](#endnote-22) With the place of publication settled, making the films could now begin.

**Creating the A-Z**

The concept of an A-Z structure arose from my previous publications. My coauthored book *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance* has three sections, People, Events and Concepts, with short entries in alphabetical order. I was thus familiar with a dictionary-like structure and had myself frequently used Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese’s *Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer*. I envisaged our A-Z as a comparable entity, though where the *Dictionary* has extensive visual images and text we would replace these mostly with film. Not all our terms were decided in advance, but we aspired to be as comprehensive as possible regarding the range of elements training covers, using all the letters of the alphabet and some more than once.[[23]](#endnote-23)

An A-Z is a helpful, albeit constraining, structure. But some organisational shape was needed, not least to help viewers navigate the substantial amount of material generated (after all, we were trying to distil decades of my and Camilleri’s experience). The format was also inspired by Tadashi Suzuki’s notion of the ‘grammar of the feet’, which he explains thus: the method is just a grammar, its significance being how one speaks with it (i.e. what kind of performance one creates using the method).[[24]](#endnote-24) This confirms why we view PATAZ as a foundational rather than prescriptive resource.

We understood that every term and thus film had to have its own structure, tone and style even, according to the specific demands of each term: no single format would work across, say, **I**magination, **C**raft, **V**oice or **Z**oning Out.[[25]](#endnote-25) Each film had to stand up and out as a useful or inspirational ‘gem’ (or in Barba’s terminology – amulet) of embodied knowledge (Barba 2002). Whereas some films might be a fairly straightforward rendition of an aspect of studio practice (though carefully shot and severely edited and shortened), of which **H**ands is a good example in that it shows a demanding though structurally simple sequence of hand exercises, others could articulate the term by means of their selected form as much as content. Fig 3

We also knew the films had to be short. We worked initially to a notional three minutes maximum as our norm, based on our research into (ever-decreasing) attention spans for online films.[[26]](#endnote-26) One might anticipate that the intention to capture the process this way would affect how we approached the workshops. We were aware of avoiding long durational sequences and the need to present principles and exercises in a precise, condensed form. This made the process slightly more teleological than might otherwise have been the case, though perhaps only to the extent that in teaching any workshop one might bear in mind students’ learning outcomes, their final assessments or an intended performance. Holding onto this awareness, we then tried to forget the cameras and the filming.

We wanted the films and the A-Z structure not to mask the organic flow of training, where participants build incrementally on what has been done years, weeks or days before, as much as in the preceding minute. We realized that the fragmentation in the structure of our films would inevitably be joined up in the viewers’ own practices, and that a sense of this flow could also be generated through the subsequent editing process, reinforced also by the term **F**low and its related film. Fig 4 We needed to dispel any notion that things could be done in isolation or piecemeal, that **R**hythm does not also have everything to do with **S**pace, as just one example, or that training could be pick-and-mix. In filming the workshops we worked fluidly at first, only later in the process and in the second phase especially breaking our work down into shorter sequences. Bennett often called Camilleri and I to account, asking us to be clearer and more succinct or to telescope something we had just done previously at greater length. Even then, there is not one film that has not required substantial editing.

One of the defining characteristics of an A-Z is that the reader or viewer can start anywhere, probably does not read from beginning to end, and each term or letter has the same intrinsic value as any other. Could we work against this, create more coherence or emphasis and join things back up? Occasionally we cross-reference terms in different films and, rarely, some footage appears in more than one term. Longer films such as **P**erformance and **V**oice or **T**ext Work show various principles and terms coming together and their extended application. We discussed the idea of suggesting recommended routes through the A-Z, but this became unmanageable to the extent that there are so many ways into and out of each term. We even discussed highlighting some terms as basic, intermediate or advanced, but soon realized that we neither could nor should predetermine any viewer’s level of ability. We also noticed that fundamental principles of studio practice were missing – basic things such as remaining hydrated, being ready to work, not disclosing things done in the studio outside its safe parameters. These are addressed in Camilleri and my filmed conversation on **E**thics, but not in any pragmatic way. We therefore compiled the term **F**undamentals, a mini A-Z within the larger one; a *matryoshka* which introduces key principles very playfully – hence the pun in the term’s title which we accentuate in the film by putting FUN in capital letters on the title page.

**F**undamentals, with its poppy music, colloquial onscreen advice and with the students briefly acting out each term, enshrines a key aspiration of the A-Z: to find an appropriate vocal tone, register and language. Fig 5. Our research and experience had demonstrated how important vocal delivery and the language with which we communicate in training is. This becomes especially evident when practice is fixed on film, removed from the messy to and fro, interactive dialogue and instruction of the studio. We were particularly conscious of this need when adding a separately recorded commentary onto a film, or when filming Camilleri and my semi-structured conversations. Good footage can be undermined by a vocal delivery that does not relate appropriately to the film (i.e. playfulness on screen and an overly serious tone of voice) or is not clear about whom it is addressing and to what end.[[27]](#endnote-27)

Finding the right vocal register did not pertain to the live workshop discourse, which could only be as it was, unalterable other than through fixing sound levels or cuts. This refers rather to post-production additions or specific filmed dialogues such as those we held on the topics of **C**raft, **E**thics or **M**ovement. Aurally, we often needed to achieve several things at once. The voice and instructive text had to be: projected out, often directly, to the viewer/listener, sometimes even encouraging their participation almost as one of our trainees (**Y**ou or **B**reath are examples of this, with the latter even including time and instructions for participation built into the film); Fig 6. not too didactic or preachy, authoritative rather than authoritarian as we defined it; clear without being too academic (we made very few references to reading, sources and other practitioners within the films which we considered would be better located and referenced in our Further Reading/Viewing file)[[28]](#endnote-28); and easy on the ear. The pragmatic working language of the studio also had to remain our principle vocal mode, something that is highlighted by the automated textual transcriptions that accompany every film.[[29]](#endnote-29)

We also needed sometimes to accomplish the following tasks vocally and textually: explain, highlight or clarify what appears on screen, matching the tone to the term’s topic; suggest further options and ways of working; and briefly introduce a term in an informal and accessible way that is not too scripted. We worked mostly from outline notes rather than scripts, though Camilleri often felt more comfortable reading from the latter. A generally lighthearted approach, epitomized in **F**undamentals, was sustained across nearly all entries, particularly evident for example in **L**ayering or in **I**magination as I will explain shortly. Finding this register was a complex trial and error process but a key discovery. We did not want to preach the principles and values of playfulness dogmatically, wary of such contradictions.

As regards our target viewer, we quickly settled on the idea of creating a foundational resource, even as we hoped it might contain something for everyone. Our notional audience was dictated in part by our sense of those who already subscribe to Drama Online. Viewer analytics were not provided, though we did ask for them, so this had to be based on personal experience and guess work, as well as evaluating similar resources and their reach as well as Drama Online’s own provision. It would of course be beyond our control who in the end would view the films, but, bearing a target audience in mind, we assumed that our ideas and practices would be new to many of them. Camilleri and my practice is not mainstream in any sense of the word, based on experimental European theatre and laboratory traditions, from Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba through Gardzienice and Ingemar Lindh. We are both university lecturers but teach as much through practice as through seminars. This approach is common in the very practice-heavy model typical of many UK university drama departments and is emulated in Malta with its close ties to Britain and delivery in English. Drama Online is an international resource, with Bloomsbury having offices in New York, New Delhi and Australia as well as London, so we understood that our training approach might be unusual for many viewers, even whilst notions such as **W**arm Up, **M**ovement or the **V**oice are ubiquitous.

This international reach and a shared understanding of the need to be mindful of diversity was always factored into our planning, though it was often hard to achieve aspects of this in practice and to break out of our habitual Euro- and Anglo-centric thinking. Our team was relatively culturally diverse and we were especially pleased to have Nouf, a mature Arab woman from Kuwait involved. Nouf speaks in the films about the importance of this practice to her both physically, as a mother of two young children, and culturally, as she is from a strict religious background and culture where women have very defined roles with very circumscribed expectations.

Although the studio practice was led by two male trainers, a key collaborator and architect of the whole project was a young woman, Bennett, editor of all the films. She was given and eagerly took a free hand in selecting how to shoot and represent the terms, perhaps best exemplified by her interpretation of **I**magination, **L**ayering and **F**undamentals. We have already described how **F**undamentals works with its sort of alphabetic approach.[[30]](#endnote-30) In **L**ayering, Bennett echoes and reinforces the process of montage which Camilleri and I articulate in the film by splitting, overlapping and merging our headshots. Fig 7. **I**magination uses a series of stock images compiled by Bennett that often playfully visually repeat or pun on the process of using the imagination which Camilleri is describing. Fig 8. Bennett is close in age to our trainees and thus understands well current student experience and expectations. She and I met regularly, viewing multiple iterations of the films and occasionally co-editing them together, actively making and then instantly evaluating critical choices. It was a very close collaborative process, one that also cut across dance (Bennett’s primary field) and theatre as much as generations.

To gain feedback in the early stages of the process, we previewed some of our initial films widely after the pilot phase of filming. This took us to Barcelona, Malta, Warsaw and Singapore, and was supported by an online survey referring to some sample films. The most revealing presentation and response was in Singapore, with its cultural difference and a university context less practice-focused than that in the UK. Here we were strongly encouraged to use more onscreen animation. This request was validated for me in my hotel room one evening when viewing a reality television programme, in fact from Korea, about inept fathers ‘caring for’ their young babies. The screen was littered with animated figures, emoticons, textual prompts and information. Such feedback made us sharply aware of divergent cultural approaches to internet design and usage. All we could do was be mindful of this diversity, knowing that our A-Z might resonate differently across the world, whilst trying to keep it as clear and foundational as possible.

**Conclusion**

German Professor of Media and Cultural studies Marie-Luise Angerer has drawn attention to certain scholars’ continuation of Donna Haraway’s work on cyborgs to suggest that ‘media can no longer be defined as prostheses which amplify the senses, but that instead, they have attained a new immersive dimension, that they replace our senses, that they also make our senses more intense and more subjective, more intimate’.[[31]](#endnote-31) To suggest that we even begin in PATAZ to approach such immersion or replacement is going too far, though VR technologies are shifting us swiftly towards more immersive possibilities. However, we often questioned how we might foster such affective sensations, using the potential of digital media and tools. We tried numerous ways to pass (metaphorically of course) through the barrier of the screen, to narrow this ontological gap: using GoPros, onfilm and audio spoken and textual commentaries and direct address, the trainees’ personal reflections, and a sophisticated A-Z of filming techniques, now being worked up by Bennett into a filmic A-Z for her ongoing doctoral research.[[32]](#endnote-32) We never intended to replace the live studio experience and remove the teacher from the training equation, as some initial feedback responses had assumed. And we always questioned to what an extent such a digital resource could approach such a possibility. We anticipated that the majority of our viewers would be guided somehow by a notional figure of a teacher/trainer: whatever form that might take, whether the role was still active or not, just a past formative memory, or existing in some other mutual relation.

No longer does studio practice have to be filmed at a distance with a wide angle with patchy audibility. Possibilities are numerous for filming and trainees can do all or any of the following: interact with the camera as a partner (in **T**ext Work one trainee speaks Beatrice’s soliloquy from Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing* (Act 2. Sc.1, 26-31) directly to camera as her active studio partner); wear miniature cameras; reflect on their experience, in the moment or afterwards; be tracked around the space by small mobile cameras; and trainers can wear microphones relatively discretely. In our A-Z editing we added non-diegetic sounds to heighten the mood (enhancing **F**low with waves), used **I**mages as creative stimuli, and suggested and ourselves adopted multiple ways of working with **T**echnology in that term. Fig 9 The viewer is never physically going to be present live but they should at least feel immersed or engaged enough to approach their own practice with new inspiration, techniques and with the helpful backing of a sophisticated resource.

Any desire to share knowledge and experiences, both practical and theoretical, is necessarily determined and shaped by the means with which one can do so. In training this is usually limited to those within the room, at least before the advent of any posthoc reflection, documentation or publication. With rapid advances in digital technologies impacting all pedagogic approaches, PATAZ posits some different ways of publishing and passing on practical knowledge. Books with or without drawings and photographs will still be written. Teachers and trainers will still train students and actors live in the studio. But the new means of transmission and training that are now starting to emerge more widely might transform the way we teach, learn and train. Projects like Jonathan Pitches’ Vsevelod Meyerhold MOOC or PATAZ require resources of a different order from writing books, but not everything needs to be done on this scale.[[33]](#endnote-33) Whether, as Camilleri noted in his 2015 article, they are part of a pedagogic and training revolution it is too early to say, but it is clearly vital to keep exploring new methods and consider their implications.

I have focused here extensively on the practicalities of the A-Z project, its planning, decisions made during its formation, and how it eventually unfurled, in order to explore issues that pertain beyond any singular example. PATAZ can help us think more broadly about physical actor training and its digital potential, suggesting how training might adapt within an increasingly accessible range of global practices.

I perceive there to be five different, though interconnected, main challenges. Firstly, such projects reveal the democratizing potential of the digital: anyone with a smartphone owns a megapixel high quality camera with which to record their work; and when and where learning or training can take place is increasingly in the trainees’ hands. Secondly, they question the ontological premise of training as exclusively a live iterative process. Thirdly, they highlight the need to listen more to those being trained, to give them a voice. Fourthly, they validate the idea of auto-didacticism, questioning what form the role of the teacher, broadly construed, might take. Finally, they embrace new models of publication of acting and theatre research using online tools, with revolutionary potential. We are, though, clearly at the very beginning of this brave new publishing world.

I hope others might follow the PATAZ example, as students, teachers, trainees and trainers worldwide share their own A-Z terms and perhaps even alphabets. We can then develop more sophisticated audio-visual dialogues, giving shape to the formless mass of materials and ideas that already exist on the internet and in which we are perhaps drowning. PATAZ would then sit alongside many other resources, speaking to and with them, arguing, countering, prompting and creating (with pleasure) together. Welcome to one possible digital future for actor training, Physical Actor Training 3.0.

8,000 words

1. See one of this special issue’s coeditors Frank Camilleri’s 2015 article ‘Towards the study of actor training in an age of globalized digital technology’ in *Theatre, Dance, Performance Training*, 6 (1), 16-29. This gives a comparative overview of institutional differences and asserts the value of auto-didactic training. My article builds on and in part responds to his important piece, though I focus solely on institutional training within Higher Education and mostly in Britain, rather than that which occurs in professional practice and companies. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Physical actor training aligns more to the tradition and domains of Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba and physical and dance-theatre, rather than that of Konstantin Stanislavski with his focus on realist acting, characters and the interpretation of plays. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. PATAZ was a two-year Leverhulme Trust funded project. We filmed three pilot days of workshops (September 2016) then a five-day period (January 2017). The first test phase was critical in order to obtain and then act on feedback before the next phase. The result is 66 films of 5 hours 45 minutes duration (including a 45 minute-long project documentary) as well as related materials such as an extensive bibliography, all published in July 2018. Many readers of this article might not have access to the films available at <http://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/pages/physical-actor-training-an-online-a-z> which is unfortunately currently institutional subscription only, so I have written this accordingly. A small selection of the films and further information on the project are available at <https://thedigitalperformer.co.uk> [Both accessed 18 December 2018] [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Most recently in his 2018. *Speaking of Universities*. London: Verso. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. This issue is characterised in the article <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/university-students-are-struggling-to-read-entire-books-a6986361.html> [Accessed 18 December 2018] [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. See as one example of many Daniel Goleman’s 2013 *Focus: the Hidden Driver of Excellence*. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Leeker, Martina, Schipper, I. and Beyes, T., eds. 2017. ‘From flâneur to co-producer: The performative spectator’. *In*: *Performative and the Digital*. transcript Verlag: Bielefeld. p.207 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Students graduate from universities and set up theatre companies (like the University of Kent’s own Little Bulb Theatre) or work professionally as individual performers. This comes nowhere near the scale of what the conservatoires have been achieving for decades in terms of employability within the profession but does show the potential of different institutional training models. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. deLahunta summarises in ‘Dance Becoming Data: Version Two’ in Ellis, S., Blades, H., and Waelde, C., eds.  2018. *A World of Muscle, Bone & Organs: Research and Scholarship in Dance.*  [Coventry: C-DaRE at Coventry University](https://pureportal.coventry.ac.uk/en/persons/scott-delahunta/publications/), pp. 333–357  [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. ‘Making digital choreographic objects interrelate. A focus on coding practice’. *In*: Leeker, Martina, Schipper, I. and Beyes, T., eds. 2017. *Performative and the Digital*. transcript Verlag: Bielefeld, p.70, p.72. For more on this research see <https://synchronousobjects.osu.edu> [Accessed 18 December 2018] [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. For further information see <http://motionbank.org/en/content/scores.html> [Accessed 18 December 2018]. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. One of the foundational sources in this area is Tapscott, D., 1998. *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation*. New York: McGraw-Hill. The publication date proves the longevity of such thinking. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. See <https://flippedlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/FLIP_handout_FNL_Web.pdf> for a definition [Accessed 18 December 2018]. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. This recalls my earlier point about the student’s perspective of whether they themselves perceive that they have been trained or not. After finishing my degree at Exeter University I was immediately employed as a performer for a year in Theatre Alibi, then a Theatre-in-Education Company. Later I worked in Poland with Gardzienice Theatre Association as a performer, besides having had no formal actor training as such. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. See <https://alexanderstreet.com>, <http://www.arts-archives.org>, <https://www.digitaltheatreplus.com/education>, <http://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/pages/physical-actor-training-an-online-a-z> and <https://www.routledgeperformancearchive.com> [All accessed 18 December 2018]. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Smith is perhaps best known for her drawings and set design for *War Horse* (2007). See her sketches in my book: Allain, P., 1997. *Gardzienice: Polish Theatre in Transition*. Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, plates between pp.77 and 78. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Allain, P., 2011. ed. *Andrei Droznin: Physical Actor Training*. London: Routledge and now <https://www.routledgeperformancearchive.com> [Accessed 18 December 2018]. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Something which will no doubt inform future understandings of training, if it hasn’t already, is the huge popularity of films of ‘epic fails’. Supposedly incidental, some of these are actually noticeably contrived and rehearsed, spoiling their impact as everyday hapless occurrences. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. We were a large team with myself, Camilleri, Hulton, Bennett and six volunteer trainees, all connected to the University of Kent. The trainees were purposefully selected for their differing levels of experience and qualifications, from BA to PhD, as well as the fact that they were from a range of countries and backgrounds (Kuwait, Greece, Norway and Britain). [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. See for example Stanislavski, K., 2008. *An Actor’s Work.* London and New York: Routledge. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. The RPA also uses my coauthored book *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance* as its framework. Talia Rodgers, who set up the RPA, moved in 2015 to Digital Theatre+ as Publishing Director. The RPA relocated its organizational base to the USA soon after with a new editorial team. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. <https://thedigitalperformer.co.uk> [Accessed 18 December 2018] [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Unlike the *Dictionary* which, I realized on closer inspection, uses only 15 letters, though some of these repeatedly. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. See his 1986 *Way of Acting*, New York: Theatre Communications Group. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. I am putting the initial letter in bold here and following to denote that these are terms from the online A-Z. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. This has of course reduced further since the funding application was written and the project was first planned. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. A case in point where there seems to be a disconnect between some good films and the instructive voice is Ewan, V. and Green, D., 2015. *Actor Movement: Expression of the Physical Being: a Movement Handbook for Actors*. London: Bloomsbury, Methuen Drama. Films available: <https://vimeo.com/channels/actormovement/videos> [Accessed 18 December 2018] [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Our list is available here <https://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/pages/physical-actor-training-further-reading-and-viewing> Scholar/practitioner Ben Spatz has developed a different approach in which he includes academic references on screen, what he calls an ‘illuminated video essay’. See <https://urbanresearchtheater.com>. [Both accessed 18 December 2018] [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Bloomsbury required this aspect for accessibility purposes, though these transcriptions can be turned off. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. I write ‘sort of’ because we highlight certain letters in particular words within each term’s instructions, rather than following a formal A-Z using single words in alphabetical order. For example, **S** is ‘Be **S**afe by Always **S**taying Engaged, Pre**s**ent and **S**upportive’. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. ‘Speculation about 1.0. On the productive difference of the interval’. *In*: Leeker, Martina, Schipper, I. and Beyes, T., eds. 2017. *Performative and the Digital*. transcript Verlag: Bielefeld. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. See <https://thedigitalperformer.co.uk/digital-technology-for-pre-he-performing-arts-ed/> [Accessed 18 December 2018] [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. For more on Pitches’ MOOC see <https://www.mooc-list.com/instructor/jonathan-pitches> [Accessed 18 December 2018]

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